

## Transcendental Philosophy in Spike Jonze's "Her" (2013): Back to Ideals

تجاذبات الفلسفة المُتعالية في فيلم "هي" (2013) لسبايك جونز: العودة إلى المُثل العُلّيا

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### Abstract:

The article discusses the Film genre as a recipient of high-tech aesthetics and devices which embraced novelty, extending the limits of art representation. Spike Jonze's "Her" (2013) overtly exposes virtuality and cross-genre relationships, yet this paper endeavours to capture and decipher the philosophy that weaves the elements of Jonze's oeuvre. For this reason, a film-study along a thematic interpretation of the film's scenery is used to extricate its leanings. The outcome reveals the transcendental tenets linking characterisation, settings, and plot, namely in the self-discovery journey of the protagonist as he interacts with a computer operating system, emulating humans. So, we sense the nostalgia for simplicity, ideals, and high aesthetic sensibilities.

**Keywords:** Film Aesthetics; Film Philosophy; Transcendentalism; Self-Conscious Fiction; American Studies; Spike Jonze; Contemporary Cinema.

### المُلخص:

في عصر ازدهار تكنولوجي غير مسبوق يُمَجّد مقاربات مبتكرة للحياة، يبرز الفيلم كنوع فَنّي حاضن لجماليّات وتقنيات وأدوات خاصّة به يغرف بدوره من المُستحدثات والمُستجذّات التكنولوجية ممّا مَكّنه من امتلاك قدرة هائلة على تمثيل العوالم الخفيّة للإنسان بما في ذلك طُرق تكويره ونُظم مُعتقداته. فيلم "هي" (2013) لسبايك جونز ذهب بعيدا في استخدام المُقدّرات المذكورة ليستقطب نقداً فَنّيّاً رَكّز في غالبه على العوالم الإفتراضية

والعلاقات المُتجاوزة للجنس. تسعى هذه الورقة البحثية إلى التقاط الفلسفة التي تُؤدّ وتخييط العناصر الفنيّة لعمل جونز.

لهذا الغرض تبنيينا دراسة فيلمية وموضوعاتية لمشاهد الفيلم أظهرت لنا أنّ بناء الحُبكة والزّمكان والشّخصيات الفنيّة تعكس جوهر الفلسفة المتعالية لاسيما خلال رحلة استكشاف الذات للشّخصية الرئيسة في تعاملها التّفاعلي مع نظام تشغيل كمبيوتر يُحاكي الإنسان مُشيرة في ذلك إلى حنين للمثل العُليا والبساطة والإلهام والتذوّق الجمالي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** جماليات الفيلم؛ فلسفة الفيلم؛ الفلسفة المتعالية؛ التخييل الواعي؛ دراسات أمريكية؛ سبايك جونز؛ الصوت الفردي؛ السينما المعاصرة.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today's world is witnessing marvellous advances in technology, communication, social networks, and a growing prevalence of cyber realities. The need for pure understanding of how humans find and perceive themselves in a reality in the making proves to be an inspired and inspiring undertaking. Transcendentalism comes forth as an informed choice of the framework that circumscribes an interesting abundance of ideas on man's self-understanding. Promising prospects of sound explanations of the position and reposition of the individual within a dense universe usher in the surfacing of a plethora of cultural and aesthetic implications.

To begin with, it is noteworthy to assume that transcendentalism is widely regarded as relatively an old-fashioned philosophy. For many chroniclers, its roots stem from the remote corners of history and the status quo today shows a certain loss of prevalence in American society and the rest of the contemporary world. With no serious dispute among scholars, it is widely associated with the American past and the genesis of the American Republic.

Particularly, the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson put forward how the American citizen should be and live in a country that incarnates the principles of liberty, social justice, equality, and happiness. Yet, in this paper we hold the view that today's America is still immersed in the confines of transcendental philosophy. The rationale behind this inclination is that Emerson's thought is prolific to the extent it encourages the individual as a human to be himself and to seek knowledge in all its diversities, in all times, and under all circumstances. For him, this is a faculty that can happen without any contradiction with society, a view that compels us understand his lasting and enduring impact. Moreover, we reckon the extent to which he focused on education as the key for the future. Part of this prospection is, strikingly, the reality we live today. In accordance with this claim and with harmony of the lively results, Atkinson observes: "his essays carry meanings decipherable only by the future" (Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p. x).

We pay close attention to the fact that such philosophy embraces many ideas from both European past and Eastern tradition for, as Emerson believed, "Europe has always owed to oriental genius its divine impulses" (Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p. 71). The contribution of the latter comes from bestowing the American flavour, namely through America's peculiar and distinct experience. Hence, the greatness of Emersonian and Thoreauvian ethos lay the motives for many generations in America, including the filmmaker under examination.

The purpose of this research paper is to bring transcendentalism into contact with today's reality, namely by shedding light on its contemporary manifestations and elaborated metamorphic incarnations in an increasingly virtualised world. Aesthetics as revealed through humans' appreciation of transcendent objects of love would reveal its essential value in art criticism. Moreover, this paper attempts to demonstrate the renewed need for a refined taste and the admiration of pristine human relationships.

To this end, we have particularly selected Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013) and set out in an endeavour to extricate and decipher the transcendental dimension of the philosophy behind its conception. In our pursuit to see how the artist could capture and work with ideas, we supply the backdrop along with a thematic study evoking the philosophical, the artistic, the socio-cultural, and the personal. Our aim is to unveil the intellectual underpinnings of such an artistic work. We, thus, contribute in challenging easy assumptions and received opinion that mark the current consensus on such an oeuvre. Our choice is based on a fascination that fruited from both experiential foundation and personal belief in the tremendous capacity of film genre to unravel the true essence of human thought. The core of Art cannot be divided and film alongside other genres ultimately thrive to enrich our intellectual faculties and perceptions for as McLuhan put it "the content of a movie is a novel or a play or opera" (as cited in Hutcheon, 2006). Definitely our vision is one that obviates holistic leanings to instead embrace selectivity. Thus, we view that a number of exemplars of this genre could prove their intrinsic predisposition and solid potential to impart an inspiringly persuasive message. Our rationale is that sincere filmmakers as other real artists are inclined to provide works which are well enriched with personal life experience. Their message targets discerning audiences for as Erik Kundsén put it, "very few would directly attempt at venturing into the very personal experience of the creative process, the personal motivations for telling stories and build an ontological relationship to the process of developing ideas for filmmaking" (Knudsen, 2019, p. 2).

The thematic study at the core of this research paper follows a triad model outlined by Elsaesser and Buckland (2002). It first goes through the determination of the general theme, which is in this case the philosophy of transcendentalism. Then, it spans over the relations that bring together the different sub-categories and constituent themes such as the aesthetics of judgement and the treatment of beauty by the filmmaker. Finally, the description of the nature of the latter categories, in the image of the cinematic perspectives, helps in providing a comprehensive understanding of the filmmaker's message and imbedded ideas.

## 2. Review of Literature

In his *The Language of the Lens* (2019) Gustavo Mercado lays plain the power of the moving images to speak for ideas through the faculty of lens, in the fashion of human eyes' deeply expressive energy. For him, "at their most basic level, lenses have only one job: to bend light so that an image can be captured. But lenses do a lot more than just bend light; they have the power to produce expressive, eloquent, and memorable images that can make us think and feel" (Mercado, 2019, p. 7).

Moreover, the film study enables us to understand the workings of society and its culture in an elaborated manner, an idea that we share with Hollows and Jancovich who stress the importance of the consumers of art production and their social settings in interpreting the delivered content (Hollows & Jancovich, 1995, p. 6). However, we observe, such an aspect of film criticism is not, as it may appear, evidently explored and highlighted in the case of *Her*. The focus on technology seems manifest instead. One of the reasons behind, we believe, is the film genre's intrinsic ability to reflect the change happening as a result of scientific advancement, namely its impact on society and culture. Jacobson (2016) notes that: "film in every new technological age is both speculative and reflexive" (p. 23).

The bulk of recent criticism on Jonze's work is captivated by the futuristic setting of the film which is impressively logic in its design and relation to the current condition of the world. Moreover, many reviews elucidate the influence of technology on human relationships. Whether this impact is positive, negative, or mixed that is another question, but to us that only remains on the edge of the filmmaker's real intents. For his part, Jeff Scheibel (2014) reads the film as a portrayal of social detachment pressured by technology: "*Her*—at least until it ends—comforts its audience that the future will be a liveable if almost subdued version of the present, in which people are increasingly turned away from others and form emotional attachments with personal technologies" (Scheible, 2014, p. 23). Moreover,

Rafal Morusiewicz (2013) comprehensively considers the temporal settings, sexuality, and virtuality as key issues (Morusiewicz, 2013, p. 111).

While technology is often colligated with quantity and unaesthetic poorly crafted productions, compared to human art, we find it interesting that *Her* is a moving-picture that manifests the tensions between high art and commercial culture. Additionally, with an informed insight we invite the reader to devour the work with new lens for it reflects Knudsen's view on *quality cinema*. For him, the latter requires the blending of writing, directing, and editing by one artist, a person he calls *the total filmmaker* (Knudsen, 2016). Thus, hereafter, when mentioned, Spike Jonze will be considered as a screenwriter, director, editor, and we supplement the list with much deserved title of artist.

### **3. Jonze's Incarnation of Emersonian Tenets**

Spike Jonze, therefore, in our view, artistically incarnates a great deal Emerson's ideal at both personal and professional levels. We argue that this is justified through his career development and artistic production, namely through the image of his protagonist Theodore Twombly. Believing in human interaction and one's role and duty in society, Jonze embraces Emerson's guidelines of citizenship. No wonder then, this Twombly embodies a man who works as a letter writer for the others, helping them to express their inner feelings and thought to articulate what they fall short of telling. On the one hand, we see through this portrayal that in contrast to the others, he is remarkably apt to express not only his feelings and emotions but even performing such a task for the others. On the other hand, writing letters is all about embracing feelings, conceiving them into ideas, and most importantly, as evidenced through the carefully crafted scenery, organising their essence in an aesthetically structured way (Jonze, 2013). Actually, Emerson's philosophy itself is, as Artkinson tells us, "not a system of thought," but a "plan of life" (Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p. xx).

Interestingly, self-reliance is praised and urged for by Emerson in his masterpiece *Nature* (1836), a form of universal teachings on man's traits and virtues. Not swerving from this drive, Twombly shows a high spirit

going beyond the frivolities of those clients as we shall discuss hereafter. To this end, Jonze pays much attention in portraying his protagonist. The film opens with Twombly, a dramatic and interesting character, redacting a letter to Chris, one of his clients. The scene is woven by the interplay of a remarkably crafted image and voice. Using camera aesthetics, Twombly's face is focalised almost filling the screen in a close shot. The compositional implications are an invitation to the spectator to make a close reading of his mind and thought. The reflective way his voice utters slowly the words shows clearly that he goes beyond the process of writing to embrace the feelings and perceptions of a distant person. In many ways, we are to responsively dissect the physical distance from the emotional one to start a journey of conceptual exploration.

In this line, we endeavour to move the discussion of the film farther beyond. Therefore, we take the stance that *Her* is intrinsically heterogenous and goes deeper in its survey of Twombly's development as a person. Joaquin Phoenix, the actor who successfully transfused those thoughts and inner feelings to the screen, shows indivisibility with the core message of the film. He seems to actually believe in the imbedded ideals as he tells us in his recent Oscar's best actor winning ceremony: "I think that we've become very disconnected from the natural world and many of us, what we're guilty of is an egocentric worldview — the belief that we're the center of the universe. We go into the natural world and we plunder it for its resources" (Romano, 2020).

In his address on disconnectedness, Phoenix visibly yearns for the return to nature and, we believe, he finds just that in *Her*. The film actually offered him the opportunity through Twombly to feel the natural growth of a love relationship. Ironically, his lover is not human, but it is a computer operating system, OS, Samantha, that he has "installed" recently. In writing to the New York Magazine, David Edelstein qualifies the film as "gorgeous and deep" (Edelstein, 2013). Such attributes definitely do not stem out of vacuum but from the profound portrayals throughout the film. This includes

not only characters and props but goes beyond to get into the underpinnings of human relationships. Such claim could initially be refuted when we are first informed that Twombly loves his own operating system, as mentioned earlier. It is apparently a mere object that is incarnated by the beautiful voice of Scarlet Johansson. Therefore, one could only wonder how could Jonze extort the humane meanings out of the interactions of his confined protagonist with a technology-driven entity.

Twombly's first encounter with Samantha, in our view, declares the essence of Jonze's project as one driven by intuition and seeking to cross the boundaries of the mind. As we are introduced to him, we see no direct rationale for the acquisition of any sort of computer software for he seems to be comfortable with the existing devices he has at both home and work. Yet, Jonze deliberately crafts a scene in which his protagonist, in a casual walk, is suddenly exposed to an advertisement on an operating system: "the first artificially, intelligent operating system, an intuitive entity that listens to you, understands you, and knows you" (Jonze, 2013).

Real knowledge can only be achieved by opening the mind to break through its physical boundaries. David Lynch tells us that "inside every human being is an ocean of pure, vibrant consciousness. When you "transcend" in Transcendental Meditation, you dive down into that ocean of pure consciousness. You splash into it. And it's bliss. You can vibrate with this bliss. Experiencing pure consciousness enlivens it, expands it. It starts to unfold and grow" (Lynch, 2006, p. 35). For this, we eventually discover that the ad slogan carries on to tell us that "it's not just an operating system. It's a consciousness" (Jonze, 2013). In a particular manner, the immortality of consciousness reinforces the film's project as one seeking the breakaway with confinement and limitations both in time and space.

This same scene shows that Twombly's actions are not, or at least not always, calculated. This instance of the narrative is, we believe, double layered as it evokes intuition in an emphatic manner. Firstly, the protagonist manifests such trait as one that regulates his approach in life simply because we know a character through his actions prior to his assertions. Secondly, the "other," in this case Samantha, is also presented as one that is



essentially intuitive, listening, caring, and essentially provocative. In this regard, Emerson believes that intuition is the faculty that provokes one to acquire the knowledge of the world. In contrast with John Locke, who advocated the priority of senses and all what is empirical, he called for intuition as a drive for knowledge acquisition. Such intuition, for him, necessarily requires love and belief.

Love in *Her* is also transcendental in that Twombly's lover is indeed physically absent, or unseen, in the sense that there is no actual woman but only her voice. We notice that this very voice was carefully selected by the artist. It is performed by Scarlet Johansson, one of the most renowned and acclaimed voices in contemporary American cinema. Not only it is an exquisite one, but is musically rich and breathy. Moreover, it implies depth and resonance. Such "personal" voice soundly engenders a real authentic feeling in contrast to electrified voices of computers and futuristic film entities used just a decade or so ago.

In addition, spatial dimension is created to imply technological progress. In many ways, voice functions at two different levels. On the one hand, endowing a character with a quality voice alludes to the stance individuals should take *vis-à-vis* matters in life, one of resoluteness and sincerity. Mankoff (2013) tags Johansson's voice as "trademark tone" only to expressively show one's uniqueness (Rapold et al., 2013). This is one of the traits praised and urged for not only by American founding fathers but by early philosophers in Western tradition, namely "on seeing a handsome but silent youth, Socrates wisely said: "Speak, so that I may see you" (Petrarca & Marsh, 2003, p. 35). In other words, it is only by daring to speak up could we reach the realisation of the self. On the other hand, voice through its physical dimension exquisitely asserts humans' potentiality to elaborate quality language. The implication is the myriad of ideas revolving around cognitive, expressive, and communicative capabilities. The ultimate end would be the creation of a sound means by which human relationships could be established to ultimately ensure grounded connectedness.

#### **4. Beauty in Jonze's Oeuvre: The Workings of Transcendent Aesthetic Judgement**

One of the lineaments that calls for connectedness is undeniably beauty. Whilst such human attribute is most commonly linked to physical attraction, it has been intentionally set apart from this stereotypic usage. In this case, it goes ways beyond erotism in sexist discourse that stretches farther in some cases to allude to queer and salacious content. Yet, in *Eros and Civilisation*, Herbert Marcuse observed that “sexuality tends to its own sublimation” (Marcuse, 1987, p. 173). Such inclination is delicately taken by Jonze as he uses the multiplicity of meanings yielded from his portrayal of beauty. He aptly sets the line between his oeuvre and mass culture that appeals to consumption-driven audiences, often marked by their frivolous and showy tendencies.

In one distinct scene that demonstrates artistic complexity, an act of cinematic representation displays a soma-psyche integration. Samantha, who showed some anamorphic symptoms in her dialogues with Twombly, wanted to dwell a human body. Her self is evolving to embrace new dimensions and create a world of its own, a process Haney equals with the “Soul” (Tymieniecka, 2003). With the help of a cyber service that is specialised in cross-relationships, she managed to make a compromise with a lady who at her end is emotionally needy and, to a less extent, interested in discovering others' experiences of love. As one “person,” she wanted to present herself to Twombly. Despite his hesitating effort to approach his lover physically, the scene ultimately ends with an abrupt renunciation that breaks the bodily Samantha's heart. At a personal level, Jonze expresses his rejection of any precarious excitement about life, while at a psychological level, he refutes Freudian vision that pleasure is the ultimate drive in life. We also infer that he favours the sacred over the profane and reason over fantasy only to ultimately expel any possibility of reference to beauty in its ephemeral sense.

Beauty raises eternal questions of what we love and why. We find it interesting that in one of the dialogues of Socrates, we do not love nothingness but rather we love *something* for we find in such love things we inherently need: "Now try to tell me about love," he said. "Is Love the love of nothing or of something?" "Of something, surely!" "Then keep this object of love in mind, and remember what it is" (Plato et al., 1997, p. 482). The dialogue carries on to evoke an important definition of the object of love: "So such a man or anyone else who has a desire desires what is not at hand and not present, what he does not have, and what he is not, and that of which he is in need; for such are the objects of desire and love"(Plato et al., 1997, p. 482). We additionally comprehend that the loved one is absent and that the nature of the relationship is ethical and human in nature, seeking refinement. The beauty of Samantha and its appeal, therefore, refers to the nobles of Twombly as an elevated learned person. His attraction to Samantha finds its roots in his love of nature, in reference to Emerson's vantage and belief that: "A nobler want of man is served by nature, namely, the love of Beauty" (Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p. 9). More importantly, Beauty is to the latter a quality that moves beyond to be naturally associated with wisdom: "Beauty, convenience, grandeur of thought, and quaint expression are as near to us as to any" (Emerson, 1883, p.81).

Thought and thinking compel us to evoke Immanuel Kant, the theorist behind the philosophy of Transcendental Idealism, who in his treatise on judgement pondered over beauty and associated it with the Sublime. In his interesting study *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (2015), Robert Doran sums up the millennia-long journey of the idea: "the sublime refers at once to a specific discourse, the theory of sublimity, and to an experience, that of transcendence, which has its origins in religious belief and practice"(Doran, 2015, p.1). Beauty in *Her*, therefore, reflects a double layer of tensions. On the one hand, it helps in establishing and carrying Twombly's mixed feelings of overwhelm and exalt. On the

other hand, it reveals, at a broader scope, the conflict between the secularization of society and the preservation of the transcendental project.

Sublimity goes beyond the limits of physical admiration as it reflects the capacity of the artist to stress meanings rather than objects and trivialities. Similarly, Emerson in his pursuit of truth advocated that the ultimate project is “to cast aside the superfluous and arrive at short methods” (Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p. 454). Accordingly, most of the scenes in *Her*, which are masterfully crafted and finely lit, exhibit no extravagance of colours, shapes, or light. To give the mind what it takes to extricate meanings and ideas, light is used in a meticulous manner not to let the eyes move unless it is necessary. In this quality cinema, perspective is more important than objects. The underlying ideas which constitute the real beauty tend to appeals to the individual’s higher faculties. For Emerson,

The eye is the best of artists. By the mutual action of its structure and of the laws of light, perspective is produced, which integrates every mass of objects, of what character so ever, into a well colored and shaded globe, so that where the particular objects are mean and unaffecting, the landscape which they compose is round and symmetrical. (Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p. 9)

## **5. Perspective: The Transcendent Cinematic Lens**

Perspective, we think, constitutes one of Jonze’s assets to move from mainstream cinematic orientation to one that is independent and, to us, intellectually oriented. *Her* justifies its circumscription to quality cinema through the careful weaving of ideas and purposes into its cinematography. It demonstrates how film and by extension art can channel the mind into a specific way of thinking to elucidate a particular point of focus within a wide spectacle. Thus, as he embarks on long talks with Samantha, Twombly literally wanders in the street, malls, and carnivals. The viewer is invited not to get impressed with the background futuristic settings, but to pay close attention to the central character. We could get this impression through a scenography that is remarkably simplistic. This has been achieved

by the shades of light, grey colouring, and the symmetrical shapes of skyscrapers that merely bear witness to the technological advance.

Twombly, in a particular scene, sparks to the eye through his red-coloured shirt. In a cinematic language, we are called upon to distinguish him from the rest of society. In explaining the laws of "simultaneous contrast," Blain Brown devises that "our perception of a color is changed by a color that surrounds and touches it. Both colors are actually changed by being next to each other. When two different colors come into direct contact, the contrast intensifies the difference between them" (Brown, 2008, p. 136).

Contrast seems to be one of Jonze's preferred choices to invite the audience to be part of a process of a merely-helped auto-conceptualisation. We could, therefore, see *Skyscrapers* challenge the simplicity of colours, pieces of technology finding places in simplistic decors, and adult designers working out games for kids. At his end, Twombly, who embraces technology, wears also in a style that is remarkably simple both in design and colours. He dresses often in the range between brown and blue, implying earth and sky as the two opposing limits of the space we live in. At a different level, a play gives also colour and joy to life. As a mimicry to life itself, they engender ideas of paradoxes and ironies of pure contrast.

Twombly's resort to games tells much about his escapism from his own reality and longing to childhood and innocence as a way out from the city that is in many ways an adult form of civilisation. Hence, the opposite end of the continuum leading to the city is nature (Thoreau, 2005, p. 73), which is for Henri David Thoreau just another word for life itself. The return to the basics is an essential step that paves the way for a fresh start to rediscover the world. In *Walden*, Thoreau asserts that "every child begins the world again, to some extent, and loves to stay outdoors, even in wet and cold. It plays house, as well as horse, having an instinct for it. Who does not remember the interest with which, when young, he looked at shelving rocks, or any approach to a cave?" (Thoreau, 2005, p. 23)

For this, Twombly finds refuge in his 3D games, a world that gives him opportunity to relive his childhood and revisit spatiotemporal settings of his own choosing. In a way, he prefers to listen to his innocent impulses as a guide in his endeavour. Not accidentally, we believe, he often plays a carefully selected game in which there is a little cheerful child who invites him to a sombre space resembling Thoreau's cave. The place requires wandering and pondering. More importantly, light sparkles each time he makes some progress in the dark, an allusion to the appeal for self-discovery. The little virtual kid literally reveals to Twombly his intentions: "follow me" (Jonze, 2013).

Twombly's wandering unveils many of the intents of Jonze's project. Although manifesting an ease of life that suggests it is one of fulfilment, the very act of leaving perpetually the comforts of home demonstrates the annulment of such hypothesis. Therefore, we believe, that this particular narrative evokes Twombly's need for happiness. Facial expressions and bodily movements before Samantha's introduction show indeed a dark side hidden within. This impression we get is fostered with the flashbacks into the days he was engaged in marital life. These reminiscences ironically draw the smile on his face, yet print a deep sadness in his eyes.

The gleam of hope appears gradually as Samantha proves not to be just an operating system but a developing character. It does not take much time to make him believe in her real potential and capacity of transformation if not to say metamorphosis. She often asks him questions, which are correlative and interactive, wondering about life and perceptions. After initially providing just a sense of amusement in their early relationship, she starts to impress him through her deep questions that cross the limits of a computerised entity. In a reminder of the slogan mentioned earlier and, in many ways, she proves to be a constantly evolving system of thought. The more she inquires, the more he gets acquainted with her and the self she is developing.

As much as Twombly makes her happy, he starts to acquire an unprecedented sense of fulfilment. As they advance in their journey, we almost forget that he is conversing with an object of technology. In a way,

Jonze leads us to believe that the ideas behind build our imagination and perception of the creator and owner of those ideas. More importantly, we see that our understanding of who or what we love, not necessarily a human, enables us to establish a grounded link with the complete truth that lead to our happiness.

Jonze's resorts to perspective through lens lands us away from Twombly for a while. This gives a chance to Samantha in a new scene to recapture our attention as she starts to really think for herself in an alerting way. The scene carries on to demonstrate her beginning to take daring decisions. One day Jonze awakens only to find her offline for the first time since her overtaking of most of his time and life. Again, the attention is moved to Amy, a friend now and a lover many years ago. She is portrayed as an intelligent professional woman who works as a computer game designer.

Amy marries Charles for a while only to leave him for trivial reasons in a portrayal of humans' confusion. As a spouse, he shows providence and harmony and as a friend he exudes an uncanny sense of direction and profound insights. He initiates strikingly illuminating discussions through a number of warm riveting dialogues. In one instance he argues about the benefits of cultivating the habit of eating natural food. The pondering way he invokes proper nutrition tells much about long term benefits of his prospections. The plants and trees imply a garden-like distant setting that grows those seeds and incubates his dreamy way of life. Regardless of his interesting mastery of knowledge, namely through his well nurtured discussions, he is doomed to be concealed from the narrative with only two brief appearances in a remote place and time, a style borrowed from renowned Alfred Hitchcock. One reading of this is that as a heavenly entity that offers enchantment, he has to withdraw from earth in that it is only conceived for mortals. Interestingly, for Thoreau, "the man who independently plucked the fruits when he was hungry is become a farmer; and he who stood under a tree for shelter, a housekeeper. We now no longer

camp as for a night, but have settled down on earth and forgotten heaven” (Thoreau, 2005, p.30). Charles’s disappearance, or being invisible, gives good reasons to Twombly and us to ponder why a great person with exalted higher inspiring powers and omniscient knowledge of the world would disappear to only remain in the background of our minds.

On a different level, or perspective, Samantha continues to develop but in the unseen world as the physical connection shows disturbance for upgrade reasons as we come to know. When Twombly asks her “do you talk to anyone else while we are talking?” she answers “Yes [...] with 316.”(Jonze, 2013) We believe, this is a pivotal moment in the narrative through which two convergent ends have been achieved. Jonze decodes the entity of Samantha to let us go back to the moment she first appeared. It is like shaking our minds to understand that in essence Samantha is ephemeral. She was merely an innovative cinematic device of representation that could embody human qualities and traits. Her aesthetic role was to deliver a given message not just to Twombly but to the receiver of the narrative.

Samantha’s abrupt need for a software upgrade reminds us of the shortcomings of technology when it comes to the intuitive and spontaneous adaptation to life as an organic system. And it is precisely for this, Artkinson tells us that “Emerson’s faith was dynamic” (Atkinson (Ed.), 1940, p.xxi). Moreover, upgrading many entities to the same knowledge level also suggests Emerson’s belief in universal wisdom.

At a different level, her unbearable answer regarding the number of entities she is connected with simultaneously suggests both the excess as a repulsive habit in the technological age as well as the possibilities vested in non-human transcendent power. For this reason, Twombly embraces a process of transformation of consciousness referred to by Robert L. Moore as “initiation,” that is, a universal spiritual journey or “pilgrimage of life,” to use his words. In this process, the person goes through three phases. The first one is the present state of consciousness. It is the sum of all previous life events and their impact on one’s inner conscious capacity, forming an image of the world. While this image is not necessarily pleasing, it manifests some coherence. The second one is a sacred space in which one



seems odd to the rest of society as he searches for the unusual and travels into a universal space where he disposes of all social restrictions to remain human and find the energy to carry on towards a "fulfilling life." Ultimately, in the third phase he lands back in the original world, with new visions and understanding of its hidden realities (Moore & Havlick, 2001, p. 78).

In other words, on the surface level, Twombly seems to fall from grace whilst at the deep level he is to take an informed decision to embark on a journey of real happiness. A fresh scene displays him visiting Amy and starting over a new delighting conversation about what they feel now. His return to a real friend, who has never given him up, evokes two primal ideas. First, they have a common endeavour they have sought since the early days of their relationship. Second, the journey they share is an epitome of the way their paths are interwoven and dependent upon each other. In Aristotelian words, they take part in a project of excellence. We rely on the fact that their friendship has showed stagnant contrast with pleasure and interest as common drives. The smiles on their faces suggest that their experiences have empowered them to see the truth of human relationships as they have never seen it before and as the only venue to true happiness.

## 6. CONCLUSION

We ultimately reach the point to assert that Jonze's *Her* is a highly incisive oeuvre, far-reaching meditation, and a stunning realisation of the spirit of both Emersonian and Thoreauvian philosophy in a completely different age. The achievement of such a magisterial work stems from its daring to challenge the prevailing cultural shallowness and the frivolous materialism accompanying as a side effect the secularisation of society that spanned over a century of American history. In a masterful way, the filmmaker, we believe, succeeds in creating a unique universe of multiplicity of his own and using within a poly-layer representation of Twombly and his society to keep the transcendental project alive. With the aim of addressing current personal preoccupations and contributing to

contemporary culture, he excels to a large extent in distilling the film's potential as an empowering art genre. He outstandingly and aesthetically turns the medium into a uniquely comprehensive presentation of ideas that examines how film interacts with the otherworldly. Such skilful handling granted him the capacity to reconcile popularity with the artistic seriousness. In a subtle manner, with a serious and amusing look, he resorts to sublimity and simplicity in an engaging atmosphere to acquaint a new generation of spectators with the spirit of a cherished vantage philosophy. The proposed ethos avoids pretence and complexity and relies on the clarity of ideas that definitely allows a deep insight into matters of life and what goes beyond. Through *Her*, he announces his will and determination to revive the nascent belief in core transcendental values as the necessary ingredients to exalt and relief. Skilfully, he provided a reading of life as we experience it today through the lens of early American authorities in the field. In many ways, the filmmaker has polished a philosophy, often seen as old and extinct if not neglected, to gloss in new social and historical arenas. In other words, Jonze's work exhibits the extent to which transcendentalism remains an intellectual major presence that has resisted the tides of change, continued to be grounded in a technological age, and proved the sound reasons behind its endurance and relevance. More importantly, Jonze imbues *Her* with a modern multifaceted vision of such philosophy that retains intrinsic rich material and value. His message is a call for individual belief in inherent potential and love of discovery and empowerment, a claim that we embraced a great deal and attempted through this paper to decipher. Yet, further critical readings could build on these core ideas to attempt to link further the existence of transcendent ideals with everyday life, namely through human interactions in the image of love and its aesthetic faculties. In many ways, our reference to the virtualised love relationships paves the way for more studies on the effectiveness of 3D technologies in representing the unseen.

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